July 25, 2006 Meeting Minutes Potomac Yard Fire Station and Affordable Housing Task Force

Andrew Hall, Task Force Chairman called the meeting to order at 7:05 pm in the cafeteria of the Mount Vernon Community School on Commonwealth Avenue.

The following Task Force representatives were in attendance:

Andrew Hall, Del Ray Citizens Association

John Starcher, Warwick Village

Jim Schwartz, Arlington Fire Chief and Del Ray resident

M. Patricia Schubert, Inner City Civic Association

Tom Welsh, PWBA

Kate Rollins, Old Town Greens

Melissa Watson, Lynhaven Civic Association

The following City employees were in attendance:

Gary Mesaris, Fire Chief

Vince Whitmore, Assistant Fire Chief

John North, Battalion Chief

Art Dahlberg, Director of Code Enforcement

Jannine Pennell, Deputy Director of Code Enforcement

Brain Hannigan, Public Information Officer

Jeff Farner, Director, Planning and Zoning

Amy Tarce, Planning and Zoning

Colleen Rafferty, Planning and Zoning

Sandy Murphy, Office of Management and Budget

Eddie Reves, Police

Mildrilyn Davis, Director, Office of Housing

Helen McIlvaine, Deputy Director, Office of Housing

The following guests were in attendance:

Lynn Kimmerly Lana Slack Ted Kimmerly Scott Newham Leslie Hagan John Porter Elise Reeder Barbara Dill Ellen Pickering Anne Marime Judy Lowe Leslie Hagan Maggie Rivers Elise Reeder Judy Harper David Englin Cathy Puskar Larry Altenburg

Minutes prepared by: Cameron Hall, Alexandria Fire Department

Following brief introductions of the task force panel, Andrew Hall, Task Force Chairman, asked for questions on the July 18th meeting minutes. As there were no questions, the minutes were approved and recorded.

Del Ray Task Force Representatives and concerned citizens met on Saturday, July 22, 2006 and prepared a list of information to be compiled by City staff from the Fire Department and Planning and Zoning.

The Fire Department compiled data on incident responses and Chief Mesaris presented the information in a power point presentation. That presentation was given as handouts and is attached for review.

Slide #1:

The information in the first slide shows the type and number of incidents the crew at Station 202, Windsor Avenue responds in correlation with that of the entire city. "Suppression Other" refers to incidents such as alarm bells, false alarms, smell of smoke without a known fire, or even someone stuck inside an elevator.

Slide #2:

For purposes of response, the Fire Department has divided the city into "fire zone boxes," which determines which unit is dispatched.

Slides #3 and #4:

Show the average number of incidents from each zone box over the last five years for EMS and suppression, respectively. The map is color coded according to rates of occurrences.

Slides #5 and #6:

The area served by station 202, Windsor Avenue, may be located on the zone map as any box beginning with the numbers 52. These slides will show which unit and the number of incidents in which that unit was the first on scene.

Slides #7 and #8:

The data on these slides shows the number of instances in which Medic 202 and Engine 202, respectively, respond within the zone boxes associated with Station 202, Windsor Avenue. Because the fire department was established and operates on a city wide system, not as a community department, other units may respond to an incident outside of it's assigned zone boxes if the first due unit is previously committed. Two hand outs were included as part of the presentation in order to show a breakdown of suppression incidents in each zone box as well as the number and type of incidents covered by station 202.

In response to a question, Chief Mesaris spoke briefly about mutual aid agreements with surrounding jurisdictions. The Alexandria Fire Department may respond to incidents in surrounding jurisdictions, including (but not limited to) Arlington County, Fairfax County, Washington, D.C., and Reagan National Airport, if home units are already committed.

Slides #9 and #10:

These slides include data for both EMS and suppression, respectively, on the number of responses made by the units of station 202; including Medic 202 and Engine 202 both inside and outside of the station 202 zone boxes.

Slide #11:

This is a map of current census tract information for the entire city. The census tracts do not match the fire zone boxes; therefore it is difficult to determine the exact population of an area served by a particular station.

Also included in the information packet is a sample of actual dispatch times for first arriving units in the station 202 areas. Please note that there are instances in which another unit, rather than a Station 202 unit arrived first.

Slide #12 and #13:

There are five schools (three public and two private) located within the station 202 response area and the travel/response times are indicated. All response times are within the department standard of four minutes.

Slide #14:

This is a cost analysis of establishing and maintaining a suppression unit (engine company) at Station 202 in addition to Station 209, Potomac Yard.

If there are questions regarding the data, terminology, or anything else in the presentation, please forward those to Andrew Hall. All comments and questions will be forwarded to Fire Department staff.

The office of Planning and Zoning distributed information regarding the use of each land bay in the Potomac Yard development, a projected timeline and work program for the task force, as well as population forecasts. (Attachment)

The question of daytime population in comparison to resident population is currently being studied and will be released as soon as possible.

Feedback, Questions, and Concerns

• One Del Ray resident, recently had a house fire and expressed concern that if the Windsor Avenue station is moved there will be further fire damage, loss of life and property because the homes in the Del Ray area burn more quickly than those in other areas of the City. These houses were built prior to current building code standards and even a slight change in response time could be detrimental. She questioned if the Potomac Yard development, given its size should have its own station. In addition, she stated that her insurance company issued her insurance based on the proximity of her house to the fire station. She is worried that insurance rates would increase if the suppression capability were moved out of Station 202.

Chief Mesaris responded that suppression and EMS service and the need for additional stations and/or resources are constantly monitored. However, there is no correlation between the age of a building and the likelihood of fire, as most fires are caused by human error. In

fact, new construction has proven to be more likely to experience fire damage due to the materials used.

He continued that there would be no degradation in service, as there is excellent, redundant coverage in the Del Ray area. All areas will fall into the four-minute response goals established for the entire city. Also the medical support services will remain at station 202, Windsor Avenue. There are no plans to close the station, however renovations plans will continue.

Chief Schwartz, of Arlington County, and a Del Ray resident addressed the issue of insurance rates. He explained that each city is assigned an ISO class rating and the distance between a house and a fire station is irrelevant in determining insurance rates. The City of Alexandria has a rating of three and will not change based on the location of the facility or resources. He continued that he has found nothing in the data to show that there will be degradation in service and that other areas in Alexandria have more dire need for these resources, including Eisenhower Valley.

Because the station on Windsor Avenue will not close and if it is determined in the future that service has been compromised, resources could then be added back.

- Apparatus size and the ability of each piece to navigate through the narrow streets of Del Ray was another concern expressed. Chief Mesaris stated that while modern fire apparatus are getting larger, it is generally in height and length, not width. Also, the routes out of Potomac Yard and into Del Ray will focus on the major arterials with controlled intersections first. It is also a possibility that fire personnel may preempt the traffic signals.
- Tom Welsh, of the PWBA asked if the small engine currently running out of station 202 should remain there, as it was specifically built for that location. He suggested that the city hire additional personnel to cover an added station, rather than expecting the existing personnel to support twice the amount of space.

The plan for station 209, in Potomac Yard is that it would not operate with additional personnel. The personnel located at station 202, Windsor Avenue would simply move to station 209. These personnel have specialty training in hazardous materials and the new station would house all the specialized hazardous materials equipment, as well as one engine.

Helen McIlvane, Deputy Director of the Office of Housing, stated that the greatest advantage to the Potomac Yard project is that the City will save the cost of land and will potentially be able to include sixty units of affordable housing. The developer is voluntarily donating this land and the city is merely trying to maximize that contribution. Under the current affordable housing system the developer has no obligation to make this contribution. Negotiations are not yet complete. Questions were raised on how many units the developer would include if the project stalled or was not completed. Ms. McIlvane answered that they would fulfill the requirements of affordable housing units, but that

number would be less or the City would need to find additional ways to finance the housing.

The developer contribution to the Potomac Yard development is approximately \$10.5 million with a portion going to build the fire station and the housing above. The real estate tax revenue will need to cover services such as maintaining streets, sewers, schools, and parks. A study of the breakdown of these costs will be given to the public as soon as possible.

- The project was initially approved in 1999, but is a multi-step approval process. When the plan was approved, city leadership at the time decided that an additional fire station was not needed in Potomac Yard, as the current system was adequate. Further research done since has indicated that additional resources should be added in order for the city to maintain nationally recognized fire safety standards. This opportunity was presented and no final decisions have been made. The purpose of these outreach sessions is to address resident concerns, provide information, and obtain feedback.
- Larry Altenberg, of the Del Ray Citizens Association, suggested that each of the projects be researched independently and feels that the developer is forcing the city to make an all or nothing choice. The planning commission is set to meet in September and the task force needs to have a recommendation by then. He suggested that the decision be delayed until further outreach can be completed. Art Dahlberg, Director of Code Enforcement stated that the original plan was to go to the planning commission in June, but was deferred in order to address community issues and receive feedback. The project may be delayed, but a cost would be associated. The city is cognizant of residents' desire to keep a low tax rate. Any changes would be impacted by fiscal reality.

It was suggested that each neighborhood civic association distribute an informational newsletter to each participant or resident. The minutes and all other materials from each meeting will be posted on the planning and zoning website. Task force members, city staff from the Fire Department, Planning and Zoning, and the Office of Housing will participate in National Night Out on August 1, 2006. In addition, a letter will be sent to each of the schools as they begin the new school year.

The next meeting has been scheduled for Tuesday, August 8, 2006 at the Mount Vernon Community School cafeteria at 7pm. The Task Force will meet independently to discuss and prepare recommendations and presentations.

Questions should be directed to Andrew Hall via email at Andrew.B.Hall@saic.com or to John Starcher at Jstarcher@hotmail.com.